

ISSUE BRIEF: STRENGTHENING VETERANS HEALTH CARE

The Situation

- The VA MISSION Act (Public Law 115-182) was designed to expand veterans access to health care through a new integrated community care program and make major investments to increase VA's internal capacity to provide care to nearly 8 million enrolled veterans.
- The VA MISSION Act consolidates several existing community care programs, including the current Veterans Choice Program, into a single Veterans Community Care Program (VCCP), using local integrated networks of community providers.
- VA will remain the primary provider of care and be responsible for managing the networks and coordinating care, including scheduling of appointments.
- The law also establishes an Asset and Infrastructure Review (AIR) process to modernize and realign VA's physical infrastructure of hospitals and outpatient clinics beginning in 2021 and continuing through 2023.

The Challenge

- The 116th Congress must ensure that the MISSION Act is fully, faithfully, and effectively implemented. If the law is not implemented as intended, VA's ability to provide timely and high quality care could be adversely impacted, and millions of veterans who choose and rely on VA health care would suffer.
- VA is required to publish new access standards to replace the current 30-day, 40-mile standards, as well as new quality standards, by March 6, 2019. The new access standards must be both clinically appropriate and realistically achievable, otherwise the costs could become unsustainable, and VA could be forced to choose between fully funding its medical facilities or diverting funds to pay for private care through the VCCP.
- VA must complete market area assessments; develop strategic plans to provide care to enrolled veterans in each market, and promulgate all necessary regulations by June 6, 2019, and begin to operate the new Veterans Community Care Program by July 6, 2019.

The Solution

- Congress must closely oversee VA to ensure the VA MISSION Act is fully and faithfully implemented as intended in an open and transparent manner that provides regular opportunities for meaningful participation from VSOs and veterans at all critical decision points.
- Congress must provide VA with sufficient and timely funding to fully implement the VA MISSION Act, and to meet the full demand for care by enrolled veterans within VA facilities and through non-VA providers in the Veterans Community Care Program.